



# BENNETT VALLEY

# VOICE

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Grange Bridge Update & CORE
- Heard In The Valley
- Oak Woodlands
- Bennett Valley Fire District News

VOLUME 21 NUMBER TWO

JUNE, 1998

## DECISION MADE ON BRIDGE

Much has happened concerning the Grange Road Bridge since the January issue of the VOICE. At a dramatic meeting of the Board of Supervisors, Supervisor Mike Cale concluded that the new bridge should be two lanes, thirty-six feet wide, and built in the same location. His decision was based on two factors; first, he said he would be loath to the taking of property from unwilling owners, and secondly, that there would be far less environmental damage if the new bridge was in the same location. The exact height has not been determined but the new bridge will be higher. Supervisor Cale said there are safety considerations in determining how high to construct the bridge. He does not want the new bridge to be in a hole again, but instructed the County staff to be flexible about the height. The new bridge will still be the lowest part of Grange Rd.

Approximately seventy-five Bennett Valley residents were present at the Board meeting. Concerns that many in the

Bennett Valley community have about the County design were presented. Bill Sullivan, president of the Homeowners' Association said, "...over the past 20-25 years valley residents have worked hard to maintain the rural character and feel of the valley...the question before us today is simply, how do we replace the existing bridge?" He then brought to the Board's attention four concerns of the community: 1. Keeping the bridge in the same location, not 75 feet downstream. 2. Having a smaller bridge that is in keeping with a rural community; that is, 32 feet wide not 48 feet wide. 3. Keep the bridge at the same height if possible. 4. No taking of private property.

Lucy Kenyon of the Sierra Club informed the Supervisors that moving the bridge 75 feet west and making it higher would necessitate using a great amount of fill dirt underneath. This would cause significant erosion problems and cause the destruction of wildlife habitat.

Rose M. Zoia, of the law firm Brandt-Hawley & Zoia, represented the CORE group. Ms. Zoia reminded the Board of Supervisors that they needed to take into account two legal issues. First, the County staff failed to evaluate alternatives to their design. This alone would necessitate an EIR. Also, if there is a conflict about an effect that can be caused by the bridge construction, then an EIR must be done. Secondly, the proposed County design does not meet the standards set down in the Bennett Valley Area Plan.

Another issue raised before the Board was the unnecessary destruction of oak trees. Marilee Jensen, co-chair of the CORE committee, referenced a letter from Bill Cox of the Department of Fish and Game. In this letter Mr. Cox states that so much oak woodland has been lost to agricultural, rural, or urban development that

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most wildlife managers are greatly concerned about any future losses.

It was also brought to the Board's attention that the County staff insists on designating Grange Road as a "secondary arterial roadway" when in fact the road is a "minor collector road". The size of lanes and speed of traffic is determined by these classifications. According to the Sonoma County General Plan a "minor collector road" may have lanes and shoulders that are reduced.

The concern over unwanted growth to the area was voiced several times. One resident wondered, "... if a big bridge was constructed then could bigger roads follow?" Another resident of the valley spoke about the bias of the data presented by the County Staff. He mentioned the value of the valley to the entire county since Bennett Valley serves as a green buffer.

During the discussion that followed, Supervisor Tim Smith acknowledged that residents of Bennett Valley had legitimate concerns. He also questioned the accuracy of the growth figures that John Cottage of The Department of Transportation and Public Works used to justify the recommendation for a large bridge. Supervisor Mike Reilly focused on the destruction of the oak trees and felt that the County staff was vague in quantifying the loss of Valley Oaks. Supervisor Jim Harberson made the observation that it would not be practical to think of widening the bridge later. The cost would be high and there would be a new set of issues and problems. ***In other words the bridge that is built now is the bridge we will have for a long, long time!***

The Board of Supervisors then took a straw vote and agreed to revise the project according to the changes suggested by Supervisor Mike Cale. The project will come before the Supervisors at their regular meeting on June 23, 1998.

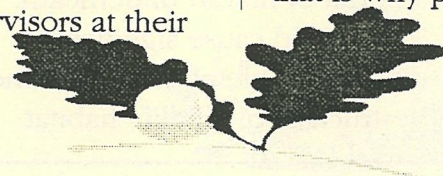
## OAK WOODLANDS

During the debate over the construction of the new Grange Road Bridge, concern over the loss of oak woodlands was one issue.

Bill Cox, who is a biologist with the Department of Fish and Game, wrote to the CORE Committee stating why these woodlands are of such importance to Sonoma County. Mr. Cox says, "Oak woodlands make up a significant part of the biodiversity of Sonoma County. In California, the complex structure of oak woodlands, with their canopy, sub-canopy, and understory, support at least 60 species of mammals and 110 species of breeding birds. The acorns dropped by the oaks provide essential food for quail, turkeys, squirrels, and deer."

He goes on to say, "So much oak woodland has been lost to agricultural, rural, or urban development that most wildlife managers are greatly concerned about the impact on wildlife populations from any future losses. Another concern with our oak woodlands is the fragmentation of those woodlands that do remain. The smaller the patches of woodland, and the more the patches are separated from one another, the less value they have in maintaining the diversity of wildlife and the genetic integrity of the wildlife that depend on this habitat."

Nearly all of the state's 15 species of oaks, such as the deciduous Valley Oak, are threatened. The Valley Oak is among the largest oaks in the world and can reach 12 feet in diameter and 150 feet in height. Valley Oaks are also long-lived. There are trees today that were around when California was first being explored several hundred years ago. Perhaps that is why people are so protective today of our oak woodlands.



# HEARD IN THE VALLEY . . . . .

COMPILED & EDITED BY MARILYN STOCKS & ROGER CREER

"Could you believe the beauty of the mustard field this spring in the old walnut orchard?"

"I heard the Fire Department made the most \$\$\$\$ ever at their recent breakfast." Congratulations!!

"Would you believe there are nine new homes in various stages of construction in the Valley at this time?"

"Some of the new vineyards are looking real first class! I hope they all will."

"Is it *really* true that *all* the students in Bennett Valley ended the school year #1 in their class?"

"The area adjacent to the County Fair Grounds was annexed into Santa Rosa. I hope the City doesn't permit another 'Hoen Ave.' to happen with Farmer's Lane!"

"The 'shed' screening the pumps at the new vineyard on Bennett Valley Road turned out to be very nice. They have even planted vegetation which eventually may make it hardly noticeable."

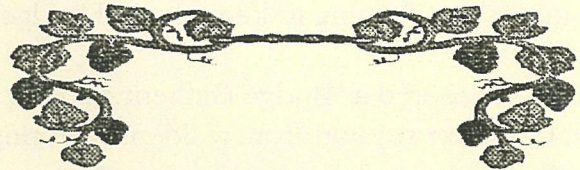
"The grasses this year are almost as high as corn in Kansas. I'll have some work to do once they dry."

"Did I hear wedding bells recently? I don't know of any churches, unless you count all of nature's hidden sanctuaries in this Valley!"

With Community Day just around the corner (August), I wonder if it's possible to top last year? What a party!!"

"Rumor has it that maybe the 'finest Merlot grapes' in the country are growing here in Bennett Valley."

"Why am I getting so many calls from real estate brokers wanting to list my property? Is the inventory that low or does everyone want to live in Bennett Valley?" *Is this a great place or what!*

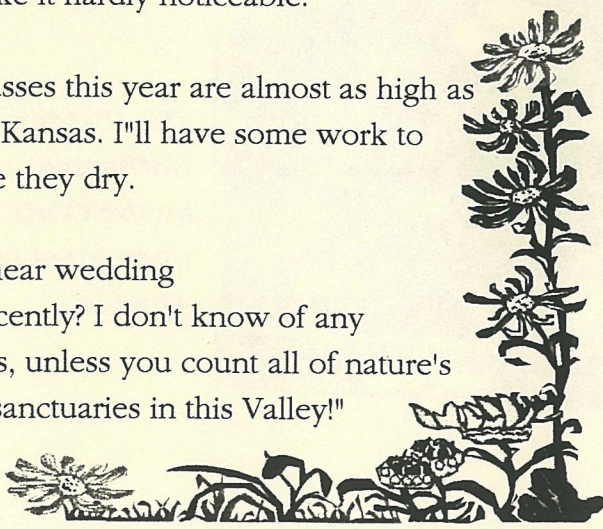


## BENNETT VALLEY COMMUNITY DAY

Unfortunately, the VOICE had to go to press before the time and place for this annual event was determined. However, Community Day is usually held sometime in August.

All proceeds support our Volunteer Fire Department, and this is our opportunity to thank our fire fighters for their dedicated service to us.

So keep an eye open for the Sunday this summer when Community Day will be held. Have a wonderful time wine tasting, eating sumptuous food, and visiting with your neighbors!



# CORE FIGHTS FOR BRIDGE!!

As most of you know, a group of Bennett Valley residents began a grassroots effort to fight for an alternative design for the bridge.

A committee called CORE, which stands for "Conserve Our Rural Environment", was formed. The committee was co-chaired by Marilee Jensen and Bobbie Blair. The goal of CORE was to inform the residents of Bennett Valley about the County Design intended for the Bridge, and to gather support for another more sensible design. A sensible bridge being one which fits the rural character of Bennett Valley. An important goal of CORE was to stop persistent rumors that a small radical group of residents was fighting to keep the old bridge!

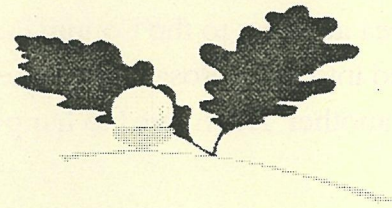
CORE sponsored a "Bridge Gathering" on April 1st, to muster support from residents favoring a smaller bridge in the same location. The gathering was a huge success with approximately 100 people taking part. This was a good turnout considering the gathering took place on a work day. The event was covered both by Channel 50, and by the Press Democrat.

In addition, CORE collected approximately 500 signatures to send to Supervisor Cale. Many residents have also called the Supervisor or written him voicing their concern about a large, unwarranted bridge.

Finally, CORE sent out a mailing calling attention to the June 2nd Board of Supervisor's meeting where the future of the bridge was to be decided.

All CORE activities were funded by the Bennett Valley Preservation Fund. If you would like to donate to this fund, contributions can be sent to:

***BENNETT VALLEY PRESERVATION FUND  
C/O 2885 BARDY ROAD  
SANTA ROSA, CA 95404***



***The "Bridge Gathering" held by the CORE Committee on April 1st.***

## FROM THE FIRE CHIEF

### *Fire Prevention Message:*

While an above average rainfall has delayed the start of the fire season, it has also contributed to an above average grass crop. It is only a matter of time before this over abundance of grass and light brushy fuels dry out and pose a significant wildfire threat. Public Resources Code #4291 requires the clearance of flammable vegetation at a minimum of 30 feet around all structures.

For questions regarding clearance around structures creating a defensible space, (without destroying the natural aesthetics) or general fire safety questions, please contact the Bennett Valley Fire District (707)578-7761, or the California Department of Forestry (707) 576-2285.

### *New Fire Engine:*

The Bennett Valley Fire District has recently taken delivery of a new fire engine. This new fire engine #7861 was designed specifically for our rural area, and replaces our original type one fire engine that has served the district for thirty-one years. Funding for this fire truck was provided by a Special Tax approved by Bennett Valley voters for the replacement of aging equipment.

Greg L. Martin, Fire Chief

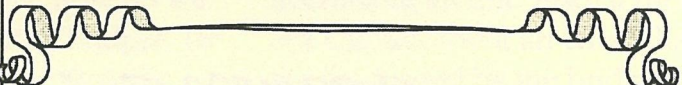


## NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH TO BE ORGANIZED

Several residents living on Grange Road have voiced their concerns to the Homeowners' Association about various disturbing problems in their neighborhood. These problems range from destruction of mail boxes to burglaries.

The BVHA has suggested that residents in that area might want to organize a Neighborhood Watch Program. The Sonoma County Crime Prevention Office will help establish such a program.

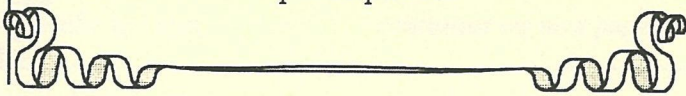
Any residents living on or near Grange Road and who are interested in participating and helping organize such a program, please contact Michael Cronin at 584-3565.



Bennett Valley Homeowners' Association  
Board of Directors

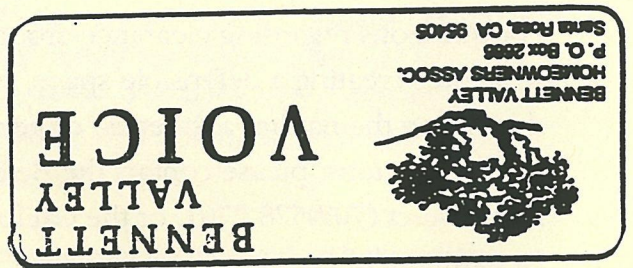
Bill Sullivan, President  
Ray Longman, Vice-president  
Nancy Dell'Ergo, Treasurer  
Leanore Mesches, Corresponding Secretary  
Eve Boling, Recording Secretary  
Kent Chillcott  
Roger Creer  
Jim Katon  
Marilyn Stocks

The Board meets the 3rd Wednesday of every month at 7:30 PM at the Bennett Valley Fire Station. We invite your attendance and participation.



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*COMING SOON!!*

*BENNETT VALLEY  
COMMUNITY DAY*

*LOOK FOR DETAILS AT YOUR  
LOCAL FIRE HOUSE!!*

